Grendel Recast in John Gardner's Novel and *Beowulf*

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CHAPTER ONE

GRENDEL'S THREE BATTLES

Introduction

Since its publication in 1971, John Gardner's *Grendel* has given readers, educators, and scholars many ideas to debate and ponder. The creation of a hero from the famed first monster in *Beowulf* has made a place for it in college and high school curriculums. With this has come the distinction of being among the most banned novels in the United States. Gardner's prolific writing life, cut short by a tragic motorcycle accident when he was forty-nine, covers wide ground, including creative works, guidebooks for aspiring writers, scholarship, and treatises on the morals of art. As well, his generosity of spirit and passion for literature is reflected in interviews, in the remembrances loved ones, and in readers like myself whose lives have been changed by his legacy.

More specifically, the literary largesse of John Gardner has given rise to innumerable interpretations of his most famous work, *Grendel*.[1] By its nature, the novel is an inversion. Whether such irony reflects Gardner's desire to critique modern society, and if such commentary leads the work toward a postmodern unraveling of the poem's ethical foundations—or if it merely emphasizes them—remains a matter of dispute.

Fueling this debate is the question of how closely we should consider Gardner's heated polemic decrying postmodernism, *On Moral Fiction*, in which he said "The traditional view is that true art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not debase it. It seeks to hold off, at least for a while, the twilight of the gods and us. I do not deny that art, like criticism, may legitimately celebrate the trifling. It may joke, or mock, or while away the time. But trivial art has no meaning or value except in the shadow of more serious art, the kind of art that beats back the monsters and, if you will, makes the world safe for triviality. That art that tends toward destruction,

[1] John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Vintage Press, 1971). Text references refer to pages in this edition.

the art of nihilists, cynics... is not properly art at all."[2] One may ask whether Gardner considers his novel *Grendel* to be "art" (he does, so the question is, how does it fit?). Further, no one has addressed the scenes in the novel that inspire school boards to ban it, the most horrific being Grendel's sexual assault of Wealtheow in Chapter Seven. Since the *Beowulf* poet never mentions any contact between Grendel and Wealtheow, the added scene in the novel is all the more curious.

Gardner was, of course, fully knowledgeable on *Beowulf* and its scholarship. As well as being a published and respected medievalist, he taught courses in Old English and medieval poetry from his graduate student days until several years before his death in 1982. Gardner's particular fascination was *Beowulf*. The poem was, according to his son Joel, "always a favorite topic of discussion, or the launching pad for a joke . . . Dad could quote it at length, sometimes mixing modern English with Anglo-Saxon just for sport . . . "[3] At the time he published *Grendel*, Gardner was thirty-four. John Howell puts it well, saying that the novel's "resonance suggests that the monster-hero (Grendel) had been lurking in his imagination for some years. By the time he had completed the novel in the summer of 1970, he had been teaching and puzzling over the Anglo-Saxon epic—his source of inspiration—for twelve years."[4]

Gardner's statements that art should be life affirming apply well to *Beowulf*. Ridding the world of mankind's attackers, the hero Beowulf takes on the role of savior, in both the basic sense of adventure hero and in the more allegorical sense. As well, the attackers themselves (Grendel, his mother, and the dragon) represent forces destructive to mankind. Beowulf is thus the moral character while the monsters are either amoral or immoral, depending on one's view of their natures and cosmic alliances. Applying this view of art to Gardner's *Grendel* is trickier, for in this paradigm, isn't Gardner's Grendel the monster who gets beaten back?

For the bulk of the novel, most would agree that the monster narrator does not seek to improve human life. Indeed, Gardner takes pains to emphasize Grendel's brutality. Since the first-person narrative is decidedly slanted against humans, one's choices are either to side with Grendel, and thereby approve of his choices to destroy humans, or to take sides with his adversaries. Given his thorough assessment of them, the latter is no easy task. Either Grendel is right and humans deserve to be destroyed, or he is wrong and their positive qualities, not shown in the novel, would redeem

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[2] John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 5

[3] Joel Gardner, interviewed by the author (Annual John Gardner Conference, Susquehanna, PA, 2009)

[4] John M. Howell, *Understanding John Gardner* (Columbia: USC Press, 1993), 61

them. On the surface, neither choice seems to generate much by way of life improvement, as appears in the plot or as one may glean from the experience of reading the novel.

Another challenge comes in locating the book within the scope of Gardner's more traditional novels, most of which have a broad and more optimistic artistic vision. A brief list of the titles of works that center on Gardner's fiction reveals the issue: Cowart's *Arches & Light . . . ,*[5] Morris' *A World of Order and Light . . . ,*[6] Nutter's *A Dream of Peace: Art and Death in the Fiction of John Gardner.*[7] Central tenets such as order, light, and peace go well with Gardner's *October Light*, *Nickel Mountain*, and *Mickelsson's Ghosts*, in which even severe tragedies allow for life affirming truths. *Grendel*, however, begins with a character we know is doomed and leads us first-person through a lifetime of violence and suffering to his fatal end at the hands of Beowulf, where he remains petulant and seemingly unrepentant for his brutality.

Some posit that Gardner means for us to see one of the other characters as the life affirming hero of the story, though this stance has some complications. Others tend to see the book as parody and dark humor, even those who see brilliance, scholars such as John Howell who describes *Grendel* as " . . . Gardner's improvisation and parody."[8] This second view would explain the work's grim and sometimes brutal tone, as well as its inverted form, yet it leaves important questions unanswered.

Howell calls *Beowulf's* Grendel, "merely a symbol of darkness, chaos, and death" while he sees Gardner's Grendel as a "fully realized" character. For Howell, Gardner "deconstructs" and "recasts"[9] the poem. As he views it, Gardner transfers the three battles of *Beowulf* into internal conflicts within Grendel as he struggles with self-identity related to his place in the world, his mother, and his darker self via the dragon (whom Howell sees as a projection of Grendel's consciousness). Howell sees the novel as deconstructing and fully transposing events in the poem from the physical realm to the self-contained, psychological conflicts of Grendel. Such parallels between the poem and the novel had not been explored, nor had the importance of Grendel's psyche.

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[5] David Cowart, *Arches & Light, The Fiction of John Gardner* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983)

[6] Gregory Morris, *A World of Order and Light: The Fiction of John Gardner* (Athens: U Georgia P, 1984)

[7] Ronald Nutter, *A Dream of Peace: Art and Death in the Fiction of John Gardner* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997)

[8] (Howell, *Understanding John Gardner*, 61-62)

[9] I borrowed this term from Howell, above, for my title.

He doesn't examine correlations between the actual battles in the two works, nor does he explore the ideological conflicts of the poem that Gardner outlines in his scholarly essays on *Beowulf*, including links to Fulgentius and *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Generally speaking, Gardner is more likely than Gardner scholars to explore and applaud the complexities of medieval works, particularly *Beowulf*. The form of the poem, as Tolkien's famous essay "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics"[10] establishes, has not always been easily classified, so it bears noting that Gardner considered it to be allegorical, though not strictly Christian or Judeo-Christian allegory.

In *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, Gardner discusses at length the use and adaptation of classical poems and mythologies by Anglo-Saxon poets.[11] Gardner considers it highly likely that thinkers such as Fulgentius influenced Anglo-Saxon tradition by absolving the ancient poets, including Virgil and Homer, of their pagan traditions—this would have left Anglo-Saxon poets free to use, imitate, and copy the forms of these classical stories.

As Gardner describes it, these poets felt they were putting such classical works to good use by more or less translating them into a Christian medium, just as church founders adapted pagan traditions to their purpose. Gardner notes, "A properly religious purpose could justify the preservation of pagan material—to lure men into the church as Aldhelm did with his secular songs, or to dramatize, ornament, or illustrate matters of doctrine" (5).

In *Grendel*, Gardner's inversion of the poem highlights the ironies and the humor, yet if we consider his intentions as more straightforward, as a parallel to those of the *Beowulf* poet, with the very battles themselves corresponding one-to-one, Grendel becomes a modern doppelganger of the poem's mighty hero. When viewed this way, one sees more clearly how to make sense of the novel's seeming bizarre and incongruous anomalies

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[10] J.R.R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (1936): 245–95. Reprinted in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963).

[11] John Gardner, *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975). While *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English* was published in 1975, four years after the publication of *Grendel*, the original article from which the book's chapter came, and in which these quotations similarly appear, was published the year before *Grendel*, in 1970, under the title, "Fulgentius's Expositio Vergiliana Continentia and the Plan of *Beowulf*: Another Approach to the Poem's Style and Structure," in *Papers on Language and Literature*, 6 (1970): 227-62.

(those scenes and motifs wholly nonexistent in the poem) that have long stymied readers and scholars. Ultimately, such a reading provides a deeply complex ethical perspective on the work, one which rests compatibly with Gardner's stated views on the role of art and the artist, even as it reveals the truths in Grendel's grimly amusing view of humanity.

If Grendel's story is to contain more resonance than the grim viewpoint of a monster doomed to perish, or a satire on the heroic epic—if indeed it is to be counted as more than a snide comment on Anglo-Saxon value systems or on modern philosophies such as existentialism and nihilism—then it must connect Grendel's experiences to some aspect of the human condition as most people in the modern world perceive it.

And if *Grendel* is to be moral fiction as Gardner has defined it in *On Moral Fiction* and other places, then it must also contain an ethic of life affirmation. In *On Moral Fiction*, he defines it further, "True art is *by its nature* moral. We recognize true art by its careful, thoroughly honest search for and analysis of values. It is not didactic because, instead of teaching by authority and force, it explores open-mindedly to learn what it should teach."[12] Granted, to teach values from the viewpoint of a ferocious and highly irate creature with extraordinary strength and an active imagination is no easy feat, yet Gardner's treatment of morality is neither simple nor neatly resolved in any of his works.

The advantage in the case of *Grendel* is the novel's connections to its Anglo-Saxon predecessor, combined with the considerable scholarly analysis Gardner does of the poem. In *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English,* he devotes considerable time to *Beowulf*, noting its relationship to pagan fables, its reliance on Christian motifs, and his vigorous disagreement with scholars who suggested the poem lacked sophistication (53-84). Gardner references not only *Beowulf* itself, but concepts extant to the poem, including religious, philosophical, and folktale motifs, in effect taking these as part and parcel of the original. In the last words of the epilogue, he calls *Beowulf* " . . . the greatest poem in Old English" (120).

An examination of *Grendel* through such a lens shows that it parallels the poem's three famed battles with three battles fought by Grendel. In so doing, it becomes an allegory on the modern human condition. Centering on monstrous Grendel as the hero-anti-hero who wants to be human with every ounce of his being, even at his death, it walks us through his progression from innocence, to depravity, to something perhaps resembling salvation. The issue of identity, particularly as it relates to individuals who

[12] (Gardner, *On Moral Fiction*, 19)

are (or who feel they are) outcast from society, culture, and community, finds resonance in nearly all of Gardner's works. It does in *Grendel* as well, and importantly so.

Grendel's Battles: Overview

An analysis of *Grendel* within a context of Gardner's discussions of *Beowulf* reveals this: each corresponds in specific ways to the three battles fought by Beowulf in the poem. Three distinct attacks differ markedly from the others: they are dramatized rather than referred to in the abstract; Grendel faces counterattack and death in these encounters; during these fights, he experiences the height of emotions, many of which are in conflict, raising the level of drama; in these three instances, the event itself shows a distinct marker of Grendel's progression in his evolving identity. Gardner's design for the novel, more complex than previously recognized, places Grendel within a parallel allegory.

Given this, it makes sense that he'd take a similar approach to *Grendel,* incorporating outside ideas of many types. As does the poem, Gardner's novel establishes meaning through a mixture of allegorical associations and styles. Indeed, his thoughts on the function of allegory in the poem as a purveyor of themes provides insight on the workings of *Grendel's* plot, especially in how the three infamous battles of *Beowulf* are inverted and transposed into three parallel battles fought by Grendel.

He uses Fulgentius' notions of the tripartite soul to divide his novel into these three distinct scenes of battle, with each corresponding to a mixture of arma, virum, or primus.[13] Further, uncovered symbols explain scenes and characters in the novel that do not appear in the poem (some of which have resulted in the novel having been banned at times). I will cover these in more depth as we consider the novel chapter by chapter, but briefly they are as follows, with each corresponding in order to the famed three battles in *Beowulf.*

The first battle may be labeled "Enter a Stranger, Offering Aid," and corresponds to Fulgenitian arma, the force of might, strength, and weapons.

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[13] In *The Complete Works of the Gawain Poet*, Gardner clarifies his ideas on man's tripartite soul, "Despite ambiguities in some key words, in Fulgentius' view of arma [virtue], virum [wisdom], and primus [sensuality], one easily recognizes a preoccupation of early Church writers . . . a concern with man's tripartite soul—rational, irascible, concupiscent—analogous to the three-part divine spirit, i.e., Wisdom, Power, Goodness," *The Complete Works of the Gawain Poet*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 230

The poem's scene of Beowulf arriving and doing battle with Grendel corresponds to the novel's Chapter Four, where Grendel enters the human encampment with the dead body over his shoulder and is attacked. Both protagonists are alien to Hrothgar's Danes and pose a threat, though each is known briefly by reputation.

In both, a poet's songs glorify humanity. Nakedness becomes a motif in both scenes, somewhat oddly. In the poem, Beowulf decides to strip off his armor to fight Grendel (though later he doesn't fight Grendel's mother or the dragon in the nude). In the novel, Grendel discovers a naked corpse, though the "nakedness" seems arbitrary (one could understand a thief taking weapons and possessions, but clothing?). In the poem, Beowulf kills Grendel by pulling off his arm at the shoulder; in the novel, Grendel throws the body over his shoulder as he enters, and then the humans attack him with spears.

While Beowulf in the poem is saving the Danes from their adversary, Gardner's Grendel in the novel attempts to save them by pointing out their hypocrisy, begging them in his calls for peace to treat one another with mercy. In each case, the protagonist is an outsider who wishes to be part of Hrothgar's community. While Beowulf is accepted into the clan in the poem, at least on a temporary basis, the opposite happens in the novel. The humans don't understand Grendel's attempt to communicate; they see only a monster lugging a corpse, and so they project the murder onto the "monster" rather than seeing themselves as the perpetrators of violence. This corresponds to Grendel's lack of self-awareness, particularly here, where he fails to anticipate their horror at his appearance.

In the poem, Beowulf wins by virtue of his might (arma), though he chooses to fight in a naked and more vulnerable state, and this magnifies his heroism. By contrast, the denuded corpse that Grendel carries exemplifies the dishonor of the humans who regularly commit crimes against one another. Though Grendel is unarmed and calling for peace and mercy, they attack him. He loses and must flee as a result of human arma (their weapons and spears), though his concern about the human community's values shows loyalty, a positive virum. Note that he carries the corpse over his shoulder, not desecrating it by dragging it on the ground; in the poem, Beowulf kills Grendel by tearing off his arm at the shoulder. Brazenly, he hangs it over the mantle as his trophy.

Furthering the connection between the two works, what follows this first battle in the poem is a digression celebrating Beowulf's victory, a story that glorifies Sigemund the dragon slayer. In the novel, after Grendel's first violent encounter with humans in Chapter Four, a long digression follows (Chapter Five), that consists almost entirely of the

Dragon's speech. The Dragon glorifies the notion of Grendel becoming a monster. We see Gardner inverting the poem to match his inverted allegory, but here the inversion is the outsider's failed attempt to bring peace, whereas in the poem Beowulf's slaying of Grendel does bring some peace. While Beowulf's heroism is lauded, the humans in the novel reject Grendel because of his otherness.

The second attack in both the poem and the novel may be labeled, "Lair of the Queen, the Maternal Feminine," a parallel between Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother and *Grendel* Chapter Seven, Grendel's sexual assault of Wealtheow. In each work, the protagonist enters the lair of a female who represents the mother of his enemies, and in each case the attack is alarmingly physical, with an emphasis on sexuality. *Beowulf* scholars (specifically Jane Chance, with whose work Gardner was familiar), point out the sexuality in the poem when Beowulf and Grendel's naked mother grapple on the floor. This parallels the novel's sexual assault on Wealtheow by Grendel, and it explains much more satisfactorily than did the notion of Gardner using the attack simply to show Grendel's brutality. As well, there is correspondence to the Fulgentian idea of primus, a term which Gardner refers to as "sensuality."[14]

While Grendel in the novel refers to Wealtheow's bloody sexual organs and says in retrospect that he used the image to cure himself (of his attraction to her, one assumes),[15] in the poem the fiery blood of Grendel's mother melts Beowulf's sword (swords as another image of sexuality, so a melted sword would symbolize the loss of erection).[16] Finally, while Beowulf leaves the slain dam and cuts off Grendel's head as a trophy, in the novel, Grendel leaves Wealtheow alive but kills her brother's pet bear by squeezing it to death (a symbolic connection to motifs to do with Beowulf and bears). In each case, the attacker's win is not symbolized by victory over the mother, but by enacting a virtual death of one's foil.

The result of Beowulf's loyalty in fighting this second battle is his acceptance into Hrothgar's community. In *Grendel*, the result is the monster having proven the cowardly humans incapable of defending their queen. Virum as positive (Beowulf the hero), inverted virum (Grendel's mother's loyalty to her son), and lack of virum (the humans in the novel) are highlighted. Here, however, we see Grendel's progression in identity

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[14] (Gardner, *The Complete Works of the Gawain Poet*, 230)

[15] (Gardner, *Grendel*, 115)

[16] For a recent essay on this well-known motif in Medieval studies, see Rachel E. Savini, "The —ick of It: Phalluses, Swords, and Character Development in *Beowulf* and *Morte d'Arthur*," *International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*, Vol. 11, Article 7. (2019) DOI: 10.7710/2168-0620.1135

from a rejected outsider to a creature adopting the definition placed on him by the ruling culture and, ironically, proving his dominance over that culture.

The third attack in the poem and the novel results in the death of our protagonists. Beowulf in the poem kills and is killed by the dragon, while Grendel in Chapter Twelve of the novel is killed by Beowulf (who inexplicably grows wings and breathes fire, like a dragon). In each case, the death is preceded by a period of time in which the protagonist has been at the zenith of their station, or primus. Yet, each has grown old and weary, ignoring premonitions of death as well as the advice of those who urge caution. Notions of doom and fate prevail. Beowulf in the poem talks to his men on the cliff, while Grendel in the novel dies on the cliff's edge surrounded by animals.

Fulgentian "virum," loyalty of wisdom gained through life experience, would seem to lead both protagonists toward this acceptance of death as an inevitability that comes with the waning of strength (arma) and position (primus), yet ironically also, in lacking wisdom, both Beowulf in the poem and Grendel in the novel come to their deaths more quickly and violently than they might otherwise. In the poem, Beowulf seems hopeful that the dragon's treasure will help his people, when in fact it's useless. In the novel, Grendel claims he has died by "accident," even as he insults the animals gathered to watch him die.

As the examination of these corollaries to *Beowulf* shows, John Gardner's *Grendel* is not merely an existential satire on an Anglo-Saxon poem but instead an infusion of allegorical connections designed to recreate and reinvent the structure he saw in the original, even as he inverted the protagonist. As well, Gardner's use of intertextual blending makes significant points concerning cultural alterity, identity, and the role of community. The famed first monster of English literature becomes, at the hands of John Gardner, the modern hero made antihero by the culture that outcasts him.

Grendel, Chapter One, Surveying the Text

Gardner opens his novel with Grendel approaching the end of his twelve-year reign. He sees the world as without a creator: "The sun spins *mindlessly* overhead, the shadows lengthen and shorten as if by plan" (7), a mantra repeated throughout the novel. In several instances, Grendel comments on natural and man-made elements that he sees as evidence for the lack of a guiding force in the universe. Grendel culminates with this, "The cold night air is reality at last: indifferent to me as a stone face

carved on a high wall to show that the world is abandoned" (9). As one can see, Grendel's interaction with the world shows the order of it to be, in his opinion, without any intelligible, or communicating, higher force. Further, Grendel knows that his creation of the world through thought and language is not the actual world. He recognizes, on some level, how his dialogue has no hearer but himself, and so his creation of a false world manipulates no one except himself.

In this way, he claims himself as his only audience, yet suffers as a result of his aloneness. This aloneness may be seen, then, as a delusion which traps him into ignoring his identity. Several times in succession he repeats variations on the phrase, "Talking, talking. Spinning a web of words . . . " (8). Rather beginning the novel with "cub" Grendel in Chapter Two, Gardner gives us the monster in all of its glory, that is nonetheless a structured reinvention of the poem's Grendel, this one with language, philosophical concepts, and a sense of humor, though with the same tendencies toward savage violence.

Scholars have noted how the symbol of the ram and the designation of the month as April connect it both to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*.[17] As well, several scholars have analyzed the novel's use of astrology, with each chapter containing a symbol and idea from signs of the zodiac, progressing in order from Aries (Chapter One) to Pisces (Chapter Twelve). Gardner himself mentions it in an interview with Joe David Bellamy and Pat Ensworth, suggesting a "clue" to unraveling the novel's core.[18] Barry Fawcett and Elizabeth Jones in "The Twelve Traps in John Gardner's Grendel"[19] and Craig J. Stromme's "The Twelve Chapters of Grendel"[20] also provide excellent studies. Per Winther finds the actual connections less than convincing what he categorizes as an overall scheme of inclusion and description, what he terms Gardner's "collage technique."[21]

A more detailed look at the allusions may provide insight as well on Grendel's search for identity. The ram's appearance in the novel is certainly a representation of Aries the Ram, as many have noted, yet there is irony in the "start" of the novel and the "start" of the astrological year

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[17] (Howell, *Understanding John Gardner*, 65)

[18] Joe David Bellamy and Pat Ensworth, "John Gardner" in *Conversations with John Gardner*, edited Allan Chavkin (University of Mississippi Press, 1990), 6-27.

[19] Barry Fawcett and Elizabeth Jones, "The Twelve Traps in John Gardner's Grendel" (*American Literature* 62, no. 4, 1990), 634–47

[20] Craig J. Stromme, "The Twelve Chapters of *Grendel*" (*Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 20.1, 1978) 83-92

[21] (Winther, *The Art of John Gardner*, 7)

coming at the "end" of Grendel's life and near the end of his reign as terrible monster. The motif serves several purposes, first in its establishment of the zodiac frame, second as an extension of this an ironic "beginning" to Grendel's "end," and third in its homage to both Chaucer and Eliot. Fourth, I would suggest, is the correlation of the fairly trendy notion of the zodiac (popular as a motif in the 1970's when Gardner writes *Grendel*) with the literary greats of the past, showing his delight in blending the modern with the classics.

The ram serves several other purposes. The suggestion from Grendel's point of view would seem to be a metaphoric alignment of the ram with Hrothgar, and in some ways, of course, the end of Grendel's reign would mean a new beginning for Hrothgar and the Danes, a new springtime engendered by Beowulf. The ram responds to Grendel's yelling thus, "He cocks his head like an elderly, slow-witted king, considers the angles, decides to ignore me" (5), and this produces more antagonism in the monster. Still, the old ram/king refuses to acknowledge Grendel's supremacy, even when a supernatural element is added, "I shake my two hairy fists at the sky and I let out a howl so unspeakable that the water at my feet turns sudden ice and even I myself am left uneasy" (5). The water turning to ice adds a fabulist twist to the novel, though this is not followed up with much intensity as the chapter continues.[22]

Leaving the scene, Grendel immediately begins to distinguish himself from the ram, which he regards as a creature motivated to obstinacy by natural urges. In this way we have a lovely reversal, as the human (Hrothgar) is represented by a creature suffering from grossly animal instincts, while the monster narrator feels only disgust at the lack of "dignity." The humor is inherent, yet pathos comes when one considers Grendel's situation. His anger and disgust notwithstanding, he is nonetheless a sentient creature whose physical reactions to the spring time in the form of lust can have no outlet in the form of a mate, as, in the novel as well as the poem, it would seem the only other creature of his kind is his mother. If there are creatures of his kind, he and his mother apparently have abandoned them, for the poem specifies, "he lived for a time in the home of the *monsters'* race,"[23] the suggestion being that he used to live in

[22] By contrast, even when we return to this point in time in Chapter 12, Grendel's attack on the goat is realistic in detail.

[23] E. Talbot Donaldson, *trans*., *Beowulf: A New Prose Translation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), 5. I am using E. Talbot Donaldson's prose translation because Gardner references it within his own translation of the poem. In a handwritten sheet entitled "Notes on translation" is the quotation of lines 53-4, prefaced with the word "Lit" (literal) and followed by the note, "E.T. Donaldson's

the land of his own race, but now lives in a land distinct from them, the land of the humans.

This isolation from creatures, nature, and God as seen in a personified and uncaring universe, creates self-pity in Grendel which he recognizes in himself and proceeds to mock, addressing himself as he rants. The stream of consciousness spins outward to an assumed audience. Within such a milieu one sees a number of humorous contexts but, it must also be allowed, a considerable development of Grendel's character, and, in particular, his desire to define himself. While this situation is ironic and not without humor, it carries an undercurrent of seriousness pertaining to his position as outcast intent on finding an audience.

Nor does Gardner shy from giving his readers the full context of Grendel's violent leanings. In Grendel's descriptions of the world, readers are lured in with lyrical depictions and literary allusions, only to have the effect reversed with dreadful images of violence "The tender grasses peek up, innocent yellow, through the ground: the children of the dead" (an allusion to Walt Whitman), then, "(It was just here, this shocking green, that once when the moon was tombed in clouds, I tore off sly old Athelgard's head)"(7). In the first two and a half pages of the novel, Gardner establishes a story brimming with narrative complexities and allusions, both a modern monster story based on a heroic poem and an examination of the relation between perception and truth.

Grendel's isolation prompts a stream of consciousness which at times traps him within his monomaniacal perspective, thus pointing to the inherent dangers of isolationism in general and existentialism in particular. As well, the role of the imagination in constructing any individual's personal perspective enters here. Grendel's first-person narration contains within it the issues of all first-person narratives, intensified by tendencies toward fancy, exaggeration, and violent madness. However, this does not mean that Gardner wants his readers to see Grendel's essential perceptions of the world—and humankind in particular—as faulty. While the monster does indeed display unique views and monstrous attitudes, nonetheless he is, at base, a reliable narrator in the customary understanding of this: his accounts of events and people, while perhaps skewed, are neither lies nor hallucinations.

The central conflict is Grendel's total isolation: nature itself and its creatures are seen as separate; anything like a plan or scheme in the cosmos seems ridiculous to him, including the idea of a god; his mother,

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translation" (from Box 25-7, the first of five pages of handwritten notes explaining Gardner's translation choices, Special Collections, John Gardner, University of Rochester Library). It's also inexpensive and fairly accessible to students.

his only kin, cannot communicate in language with him; even the humans, with whom he would seem to have the most in common, are objects of his scorn and at any rate, by the end of his twelve-year reign of terror, are at war with him. He describes it this way, "Such are the tiresome memories of the shadow-shooter, earth-rim-roamer, walker of the world's weird wall" (7), a succession of kennings that pay tribute to Anglo Saxon poetry, just as they are an ironic nod toward the narrator's sardonic commentary. Grendel's constant inner conversations show not just a propensity for weird humor and sudden philosophical contemplation, but also his fragmented personality.

Grendel's discussion of his mother raises questions (also in the poem) concerning their species, and, as well, the alliance of humankind with guilt, and by extension to Cain's sin. At the same time, the opening makes clear Grendel's distinction from animals, none of whom accept him as one of their own. Nor can Grendel be merely human, for his physical prowess far surpasses any of Hrothgar's thanes. Chapter One contains a description of Grendel's mead hall raids, the horror made humorous by how the thanes cover the light in an attempt to gain advantage. This blinds *them*, but not Grendel. The humor is not merely in seeing the poem's mead hall raids from an inverted perspective, but in the ironic truths this gives about ourselves, of such errors in our own lives. Attempting to turn situations to our advantage, in our haste we worsen our predicament.

Nor is Grendel exempt from this, for he, too, has human tendencies. In Chapter One, we find him on the eve of his death, sick from power after eleven years of bloodlust. The pinnacle of power has made his existence hellish. At the chapter's ending, the monster stands watching the funeral pyre from a distance, engorged by his night of feasting. He overhears the humans crying out, even in their pain trying to rationalize the horror, suggesting punishment sent by an angry god, that their pain is a result of their own sins (13), references to guilt that mirror his earlier joke about his mother's guilt and humanness. The reference is magnified by his description of the humans as "lunatic" (twice), just as earlier he'd described himself as a "disfigured son of lunatics" (6).

Gardner's monster, while removed from society enough to observe our foibles, nonetheless spends his existence obsessed with the humans he destroys. His inability to master the humans angers him, but the result seems to be a return to his primal self, with "cringe" signifying his sense of guilt, "clawing" his animal-like nails, and "flee for home" (14) a sense of fear along with displacement from the human community—their "home" cannot be his home, for they regard him as "other," and in his

reaction to this state, he has further outcast himself by becoming their vanquisher.

The question might be posed: why *shouldn't* Grendel act like a monster? Even in *Beowulf*, the poet gives us terrible Grendel doomed to Hell, yet the creature does not attack randomly. He endures the sounds of the mead hall until he can't any longer. Despite the rage in Grendel's subsequent attack, the *Beowulf* poet seems to imbue the monster with very human qualities of anguish, jealousy, and the desire for power. The poet shows even more empathy to Grendel's mother, noting her loyalty and the fact that she has lost her only son; she may kill Aescher, but she doesn't take his head as a trophy. Instead, she retrieves her son's arm from over the mantle and takes it to her lair with the rest of his remains.

The issue of whether these monsters are human begs the question of who has labeled them inhuman. The poet references Cain and the Old Testament. In our modern world, the parables of Jesus (such as the Good Samaritan) teach love and acceptance, even outside of one's clan. Indeed, stigmatizing others as "less than human" has resulted in the worst of modern atrocities, so why should those forced into such roles honor the human rights of their persecutors?

Grendel's and his mother's associations with Cain and Cain's kin are, in and of themselves, reason in the poem for their disassociation from God. Similarly, both species and race are important considerations in Gardner's novel, as Grendel attempts to define himself and make a place in the world. There exists, then, the basic inquiry into the extent of Grendel's humanness, a significant issue for many reasons but certainly vital when it comes to the issue of whether his "eating people" equates to cannibalism and murder.

Gardner's scholarship on *Beowulf* may be useful here, for the establishment of both an actual and an allegorical frame for the novel. He points to the importance of Scyld's funeral as a motif of the poem's opening and mentions the possible reasons for this funeral as "the formal balance of Beowulf's funeral and Scyld's."[24] Gardner uses a similar paradigm in the novel, the human funeral here in Chapter One, with its anguish of defeat turning into something like relief, as a parallel to Grendel's death in Chapter Twelve at the hands of the human hero, a painful death that is also a respite from suffering.

Chapter One of *Grendel*, for all the humor and irony and indeed a burlesque of rollicking prose, establishes Grendel as a narrator with an important story to tell. His story, beginning near the end of his monstrous

[24] (Gardner, *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, 66)

attacks on Hrothgar's Danes, defines a monster both terrifying and very human. Within this darkly humorous ironic reversal, however, the novel contains many layers, resonances, and parallels, suggesting more than a simple turnabout of a familiar work—indeed, showing it to be Gardner's reinvention of the poem on a modern level.

Grendel, Chapter Two, Surveying the Text

Gardner alludes to Scyld's funeral in Chapter One, so in Chapter Two when he takes readers back to Grendel's childhood, it bears resemblance to *Beowulf's* opening, the mention of Scyld as a foundling. In the novel, Grendel leaves the safety of his home environment and ventures from the cave, for the first time going through the fire-snake lake to the world at the other side. There (completely alone, as infant Scyld was alone once he was put forth in the boat), Grendel is found by men just as Scyld was found by men. The humans in both works spend time staring at the foundling, wondering what they have come upon, and considering the portents.

The men adopt Scyld and he grows into a leader who will become famous as a king who terrifies other tribes by wrecking their mead halls; in Gardner's novel, Grendel the foundling is attacked by humans, rescued by his mother, and grows into the being known as the destroyer of mead halls. In the poem, inclusion in the community creates through fealty, "a good king," while in the novel, alienation of the foundling creates a deadly enemy. Chapter Two parallels the poem both in motif and in theme and becomes a fitting prelude to the rest of the book.

Chapter Two again makes mention of Grendel's skill and use of language, yet the irony here comes both in the reader's apprehension of the words and Grendel's equation of them with non-reality, death and isolation: "Talking, talking, spinning a spell, pale skin of words that closes me in like a coffin," Gardner adds a playful wink to the reader, with "I used to play games when I was young—it might as well be a thousand years ago," since the modern audience is reading a novel written roughly a thousand years after the writing of the poem.

Questions of Grendel's species emerge. Gardner describes child Grendel in terms that connect him to both human children and the offspring of animals: playing "war games," yet "Like a puppy nipping, preparing for battle with wolves" (16). Likewise, within his mother's cave he encounters strange beings that he assumes are in some way related to him; they suggest elements of his heritage, both an alliance to his mother and himself in terms of their glowing eyes, and a connection to humanity through what would seem to be a type of language.

Gardner may be connecting these to the *Beowulf* poet's description of Cain's kin, as described by Donaldson, "From him [Cain] sprang all bad breeds, trolls and elves and monsters—likewise the Giants who for a long time strove with God: He paid them their reward for that."[25] This family connection between Grendel and the cave dwellers may be seen as his community, an idea presented by the zodiac sign corresponding to this chapter, Taurus the bull, a creature that shows up by instinct to protect the calf.

Once injured by the bull, Grendel in immense pain remembers those who share a cave with him and with his mother. In that moment, he seems to recognize their lack of a bond to one another and to him. These and those that follow seem to inspire his existentialist philosophy, the idea that he alone exists in the universe.[26] While Chapter Two is framed by the bull's attack and his mother's rescue of him, its core is Grendel's first encounter with men, who are distinctly separate from animals like the bull and creatures like himself and his mother, in terms of physical attributes and in their response to danger.

In a humorous scene as the humans surround Grendel in the tree and wonder what he is, whether fungus or spirit. Their fearful response when he cries out in hunger shows the language barrier, but also suggests Grendel's inability to perceive himself as men perceive him, as a threat. In Gardner's scenario, had the monster been more prudent or the men more courageous, an entirely different outcome may have ensued. Instead, Hrothgar throws an axe, a moment which becomes a focal point in Grendel's memory.

Grendel's mother rescues him, a display of her loyalty foreshadowing her raid on the mead hall after Grendel's death, in the poem. The maternal salvation contains the use of Eucharistic imagery, "Then her smell poured in like blood into a silver cup" (27-28), a comparison that connects his mother to Wealtheow's role in the poem as peace-weaver, emphasized in the novel by a later description of the queen, "When drunken men argued . . . she came between them, wordless, uncondemning, pouring out mead like a mother's love . . . " (103). The pairing of Wealtheow with Grendel's mother will figure largely into the second battle, Chapter Seven.

Rescued by his mother and back in the cave, Grendel comments on the conspicuous absence of the creatures who share their dwelling. Then, though his mother has saved him from probable death at the hands of the humans, he comments instead on her lack of language and her inability to

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[25] (Donaldson, *trans., Beowulf*, 5)

[26] Howell notes that Grendel's tree incident is the beginning of the character's existentialism (67).

communicate with him verbally (28), mirroring his failed communication with the humans who surrounded him.

The chapter concerns loyalty and protection, tribal unity, attributes of virum, pitted against the might of arma. The bull comes to the calf, seen in the way Hrothgar and his men gather, regroup for protection, and attack, and then shown as Grendel's mother rescues him from both the natural world (the tree, the bull) and the world of humans. When cub Grendel roars from hunger, they halt all discussion and attack, as Hrothgar has ordered, despite the creature being incapacitated in the tree, thus a failure of arma through paranoid fear of danger. It also concerns Grendel's isolation and his need to craft an identity of self-protection; having left the safety of the cave in a sign of independence, he finds himself trapped. In each of the motifs, Grendel pits himself against definitions and spins himself a skin as he attempts to create his own identity (from his past) or to justify it (in the present).

On a wider scale, Grendel's encounter with men separates him from human society, their fearful reaction and attack defining him as monstrous, an ironic contrast to Scyld's adoption by men. Scyld's funeral is compared to his arrival, "They provided him no lesser gifts, treasure of the people, than those had done who at his beginning first sent him forth on the waves, a child alone."[27] Scyld's family provided a presentation which affected his finders in a positive way, and he grows to be a great king and dies with great tributes, as well as the code of kingship that he bequeaths to his sons and their sons. In Grendel's family, the physical traits inherited from his mother, combined with the desire to communicate from his more human ancestry, inspire terror in Hrothgar's court. As a consequence of this first encounter, Grendel sees himself as completely isolated in the world.

That he grows into a brutal killer cannot be attributed to his mother, for she does not use her power until her cub is in danger and her instincts are aroused. In the poem, Grendel raids the mead hall for twelve years, but his mother does not appear except after his death, to avenge him through one death only and to reclaim part of his body. Nor does she reappear: Beowulf must go to her lair to find her. This shifts the blame for Grendel's jealousy and his hunger for dominance away from her and onto his environment, his experiences, and to the human community at large, genetically through Cain and practically, in the Danes' rejection of him.

It does more than this, as well. Just as the use of first-person narration gives Grendel a unique voice, Chapter Two's introduction to Grendel's childhood shows the radical changes he's been through since his time as

[27] (Donaldson, *trans., Beowulf*, 4)

an innocent cub. Beowulf arrives well after these changes, so the novel's tension does not come from the disparity between so-called monstrosity and so-called heroism. Rather, both the conflicts and the humor in the novel result from the human community's failures to see beyond their initial perception of him as a hideous creature. They project monstrosity onto him and then, in attempting to fight their perceived foe, they "create" a monster from what might otherwise be a harmless, sentient being.[28] Unfortunately for him, and for the humans he comes to destroy, he takes as his teachers the humans themselves.

In terms of the natural versus the supernatural, while Chapter One shows Grendel as supreme and even charmed, as when on the first page his roar turns the puddle "sudden ice" (5), elements of magical realism are largely absent in Chapter Two, where Gardner gives us "Grendel the cub" as a lovable and endearing character. If Gardner, following this line of thought, creates a novel that inverts the overall perspective, and then in Chapter Two shows us the creature's childhood innocence, either he means for us to discount the innocence as part of the joke—and therefore to see Grendel as a completely biased and unreliable narrator—or he means to point out the actual significance of such a conversion.

Further, in chapters following Two, Grendel finds the humans to be increasingly pathetic. His judgments become harsher. If one assumes he's an untrustworthy narrator, then the core of the book is basically a treatise against unwise Grendel who has lied about his original innocence and likewise is lying about the idiocy of humans. The point of such a novel would be that monsters cannot properly perceive humans, which strikes me as less interesting on all counts.

The movement back in time of Chapter Two echoes in certain ways Gardner's ideas about the poem and its structure. In *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, he notes the importance of referencing Beowulf's credentials in his development as a hero worthy of great tales: "The poet sets up the terms of the heroic ethic (Fulgentius' principles of felicity) . . . the *Beowulf*-poet shows, through allusions to the hero's past, how Beowulf came to present maturity, the unambiguous state of wisdom and valor from which, in his last days, he will decline."[29]

In Chapter Two of his novel, Gardner begins a similar exploration of how Grendel becomes monstrous. A Fulgentian classification may be applied. His childhood exploits test his arma, perhaps akin to the poem's

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[28] Nor is such a proposal absent from the poem: the horror of Grendel's (and his mother's) attacks comes from their connection to humanity, not their distance from it, as Tolkien shows in "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," 247

[29] (Gardner, *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, 77)

stories of Beowulf's contests with Brecca. Likewise, the monster cub struggles to attain virum (loyalty and wisdom), so adopts existentialism as his creed, which makes sense as he is locked out from the human community and has no outlet for communication, no one to help him correct any lapses in logic. Such lapses cause him to perceive himself as completely alone, at direct odds with the bond he may be entitled to on the most natural level, his relationship with his mother. By failing to see himself accurately, Grendel enters into a state of confusion which pulls him back and forth between wanting to belong and wanting to isolate.

Seeing the distinct worlds in the incident with the bull and with the humans, he cannot locate himself, except to ally with his mother's race. Yet this, too, is unsatisfactory. Connections of "blood" figure dramatically into this chapter, so it is fitting for Grendel to end his thoughts with a return to the ideas of speech in the chapter's opening, the speech act being one of the ways he is separate from his mother, and to return to their vital connection through the blood relationship, "I smell my mama's blood and, alarmed, I hear from the walls and floor of the cave the booming, booming of her heart" (29).

Grendel Chapter Three, Surveying the Text

Insofar as Grendel has defined himself in Chapter Two as separate from man, in terms of his interest in conservation and his lack of cruelty (neither killing needlessly nor upsetting the balance of nature), most readers are hard-pressed to disagree with the notion of him as a higher form of being. Grendel describes Hrothgar and his men as, "They were small . . . yet in some ways they were like us, except ridiculous and, at the same time, mysteriously irritating, like rats. Their movements were stiff and regular, as if figured by logic" (24).

The division becomes ironic, the poem's monster now a concerned protector of the natural world while its human heroes figure their movements "by logic" and misuse the environment. Such questions are intensified in Chapter Three, when the Shaper's art creates a myth-like nexus between the heroic marauders of the past and the exploits of Hrothgar's court.

Chapter Three corresponds to the zodiac sign of Gemini the twins, and along with the motif of twins comes our introduction of the Shaper, the poet who inspires the humans by singing of their connection to God.[30] The

[30] Gardner names him the "Shaper" after the Anglo-Saxon word *scop*, which means to shape or create, a word also applied to Anglo-Saxon poets.

Shaper "sings for his supper," in the novel, a dual nature consistent with the sign. His songs set up the dynamic inspiring Grendel's first violent entry into Hrothgar's court, in both poem and novel, so his place in the works bears exploration.

While Chapters One and Two may be said to contrast Grendel's ferocious last years with his innocent beginnings, Chapter Three leads us into the middle section of the tale, the events which link the beginning to the ending. They explain his having gone from innocence to anguish, from sanity to madness. The introduction of the Shaper in this chapter further strains Grendel's identity issues, for he is both drawn to and repulsed by the Shaper's art. The Shaper's songs influence Hrothgar's community and strengthen the pride that instigates their nation-building. In addition, his songs become both a religious focal point and a concretization of the creed of conquering.

By contrast, Grendel's complex thought processes find no outlet except in his own "spinning of webs," and he has no members of his species with whom to share them, further drawing him toward the Shaper's art and the humans served by it. Matters are made worse for Grendel by the glorification of humans in the Shaper's songs, especially as those songs prompt Hrothgar's thanes to more bloody warfare. Nor is the influence limited to the humans. Unfortunately for Grendel, the songs prompt him toward a definition of himself as monstrous. So, in effect, the Shaper's art shapes Grendel by teaching him (or seeming to teach him) about monsters and heroes, and codes of behavior to do with both.

Especially here, where Grendel gives us the Shaper's introduction, the facts of the matter must be scrutinized. Examination of the chronology reveals the Shaper's art to be the root cause of Grendel's attack (just as it is in the poem). Gardner's commentary on *Beowulf* underscores this point, "The focus of the lines introducing Grendel is on the monster's sorrowing rage."[31] It isn't clear in the poem how well Grendel understands language, but in the novel, he is entirely capable.

As well, Grendel is poised for a conversion against the humans before the Shaper arrives; the violent "busy ness" of Hrothgar and his men mingles with his own coming of age. As Grendel continues to watch in horrified fascination, year by year, his distaste grows. He comments, "There was nothing to stop the advance of man. Huge boars fled at the click of a harness. Wolves would cower in the glens like foxes when they caught the deadly scent. I was filled with a wordless, obscurely murderous unrest" (40). Up to this point, then, the monster has not attacked. The next

[31] (Gardner, *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, 66)

sentence heralds the arrival of the new Shaper, "One night, inevitably, a blind man turned up at Hrothgar's *temporary* mead hall," (40, italics mine). The great Heorot has not been built.

Chronologically speaking, Grendel has his first encounter with men as a cub, and although he bears some resentment for Hrothgar's axe attack (the sarcasm of comparing Hrothgar to stepping on a poisonous snake is clear), he does not begin to attack. He watches and his anger grows. Next, the Shaper arrives while Hrothgar is yet in a "temporary" mead hall. The Shaper's first song begins, "Lo, we have heard the honor of the Speardanes, nation-kings, in days now gone, how those battle-lords brought themselves glory . . . " (42), lines which are also the beginning of *Beowulf* the poem. At the same time, the Shaper cannot properly be reciting *Beowulf* because the monster has not yet attacked, nor is there any Heorot, practically speaking, to be attacked. Scyld's story is enough, however, to inspire his audience.

The image of Gemini and duality comes to the fore here, both as a symbol of communication and of dualism. Grendel describes the Shaper as follows: "He knew his art. He was king of the Shapers . . . That was what had brought him over wilderness, down blindman's alleys of time and space, to Hrothgar's famous hall. He would sing the glory of Hrothgar's line and gild his wisdom and stir up his men to more daring deeds, for a price" (42).

The effect on Hrothgar's people is impressive, "They would seize the oceans, the farthest stars, the deepest secret rivers in Hrothgar's name! . . . It went on and on, a fire more dread than any visible fire" (43). Is Grendel wrong to see the inspiration as detrimental? He, too, is affected by the song and begins to perceive a dual reality, the truth he knows to be real and the truth of the idyllic vision of expanding Hrothgar's kingdom, as expressed by the Shaper.

The rhetoric of the narrative, with its particulars of description and detail of the horrors, in combination with Grendel's knowledge that his emotional reaction to the art, directly contrasts the truth as he has witnessed it, as well as the logical paradox presented by the dual truths, prompts one to accept his perspective as valid. After hearing the Shaper, Grendel states: "I knew the truth . . . I remembered the ragged men fighting each other till the snow was red slush . . . Yet I also remembered, as if it had happened, great Scyld, of whose kingdom no trace remained . . . And the stars overhead were alive with the promise of Hrothgar's vast power, his universal peace" (44).

If Grendel's observations are correct, and we have no reason to believe he has misinterpreted man's bloody acts, then the Shaper has created a

convenient lie "for a price." There is nothing virtuous in doing so, it does not appear to be an act of deliverance for humans, nor does it correspond to any of Gardner's descriptions of moral art. Grendel feels torn by the discrepancy between the truth as he has seen it (and convincingly conveyed it) and the heroic and lofty twists put upon it by the Shaper's art: "Thus I fled, ridiculous hairy creature torn apart by poetry— crawling, whimpering, streaming tears, across the world like a two-headed beast, like a mixed-up lamb and kid at the tail of a baffled, indifferent ewe—and I gnashed my teeth and clutched the sides of my head as if to heal the split, but I couldn't" (44).

The image of twin-ness in this passage and in the paragraph above it "Every sheep and goat had its wobbly twins" (44) emphasizes the split. Similarly, the image as it applies to Grendel is worth noting. For Grendel, the rhetorical pairing of the lamb and the goat emphasizes the contrast between them, one with significant symbolic differences. As well, note the reference to his mother, as a "baffled ewe." Grendel as progeny is "a two-headed beast . . . a mixed-up lamb and kid."

Traditionally, the lamb stands for the innocence of unblemished sacrifice (often extended to a Christ symbol), whereas the goat or the "kid" connotes rebellion and Devil symbolism. It could be surmised that here, at least, the connection between Cain and the Devil means that Grendel's (human) paternal side connects him to evil. At this point in the novel, the Shaper has not discussed the Cain and Abel story, so the reference to Grendel's paternal roots would not be specific; still, his search for identity finds no outlet in his mother ("baffled and indifferent"), so it would make sense for him to search the male lineage for answers, just as in Chapter Two his references to the others in the cave were male, "uncles" or "brothers" not "aunts" and "sisters."

Other dualities are present as well. His mother is a natural creature without language or art and seemingly content with her existence, while Grendel feels tortured by his lack of identity and community, or even an audience. Grendel, who has not attacked Hrothgar's court and remains unknown to the thanes except as a possible creature who haunts the moors, nonetheless senses in his outcast state a lack of grace, a split between himself and the proper world—concretized by the Shaper's poem—which has outcast him. Similarly, his "murderous unrest" begins to take shape in response to the Shaper's art and his own growing need for identity.

In effect, the Shaper provides a paradigm, the power of his art inspiring the humans with notions of their own greatness, whereas Grendel seeks acknowledgement of his own existence and his place in the world. At the chapter's end, Grendel shrieks twice and both contain significant markers